

A
DESCRIPTION
OF THE
HERMITAGE
AT
WARKWORTH



ALNWICK,
PRINTED BY J. CATNACH,
1800.

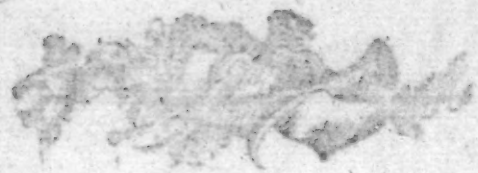
DESCRIPTION

OF THE

HERMITAGE

AT

WARRINGTON



ALWAYS

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1800.

DESCRIPTION &c.

I SHALL now, in compliance with your request, attempt to give you a description of the Ruins of the ancient Hermitage at Warkworth, which the very interesting Ballad lately published on that subject, excited in me so great a desire to see.

As I went from Newcastle, I quitted the great Northern Road at a small village called Felton, (which stands about midway between Morpeth and Alnwick) and had a most romantic ride for the most part down a beautiful rocky Vale worn by the current of the river Coquet, which afforded a succession of very picturesque scenes.

I was much pleased with the situation of Warkworth itself; particular-

ly with the Castle, which, altho' in ruins, is a fine Monument of ancient Grandeur, being one of the proud Fortresses, which heretofore belonged to the noble House of Percy, and from them descended to the present Duke and Dutchess of Northumberland, who, together with the princely possessions, have inherited the generosity and magnificence of that great family.

Warkworth Castle deserves itself, a particular description: I shall, therefore at present only observe, that it is very boldly situated on an eminence, and overlooks the river Coquet, where it discharges its waters into the sea, and almost washes an Island of the same name; which from its circular form, easy distance from the shore and a little Antique Tower, the remains of a small monastic edifice erected upon

it, is a most beautiful object seen from every part of the coast.

From the Castle we ascended not more than half a mile up the river, before we came to the Hermitage; which is probably the best preserved and most entire now remaining in these kingdoms. It still contains three Apartments, all of them hollowed in the solid Rock, and hanging over the river in the most picturesque manner imaginable, with a covering of ancient hoary Trees, Reliques of the venerable Woods, in which this fine solitude was anciently embowered.

As the Hermitage, with all its striking peculiarities, is very exactly described in the Ballad of the HERMIT of WARKWORTH, I might be content to transcribe the descriptive part of that Poem: but as you have insisted upon my relating to you what I saw myself, I shall endeavour to obey you.

The Cave contains three Apartments; which, by way of distinction, I will venture to call the Chapel, Sacristy, and Antichapel. Of these, the Chapel is very entire and perfect: but the two others have suffered by the falling down of the rock at the west end. By this accident a beautiful Pillar, which formerly stood between these two apartments, and gave an elegant finishing to this end of the Sacred vaults, was within the memory of old people, destroyed.

The Chapel is not more than eighteen feet long, nor more than seven and a half in width and height; but is modelled and executed in a very beautiful stile of Gothic Architecture. The Sides are ornamented with neat Octagon Pillars, all cut in the solid Rock which branch off into the cieling, and forming little pointed Arches, terminate in Groins. At the east end is a

handsome plain Altar, to which the Priest ascended by two Steps: These in the course of ages, have been much worn away through the soft yielding nature of the stone. Behind the Altar is a little Nich, which probably received the Crucifix, or the Pix. Over this Nich is still seen the faint outline of a Glory.

On the North-side of the Altar is a very beautiful Gothic Window, executed like all the rest, in the living Rock. This Window transmitted light from the Chapel to the Sacristy: or what else shall we call it, being a plain oblong room which ran parallel with the Chapel, somewhat longer than it, but not so wide. At the east end of this apartment are still seen the remains of an Altar, at which Mass was occasionally sung, as well as in the Chapel. Between it and the Chapel is a square Perforation, with some appearance of

Bars, or a Lattice, thro' which the Hermit might attend Confession, or behold the elevation of the Host without entering the Chapel. Near this Perforation is a neat Door-case opening into the Chapel out of this Side-room or Sacristy, which contains a Benching cut in the rock, whence is seen a most beautiful View up the river, finely overhung with woods. Over the Door-case, within the Chapel, is carved a small neat Scutcheon, with all the emblems of the Passion, so, the Cross, the Crown of Thorns, the Nails, the Spear, and the Sponge.

On the south side of the Altar is another Window, and below it a neat Cenotaph or Tomb, ornamented with three human Figures elegantly cut in the rock. The principal Figure represents a Lady lying along, still very entire and perfect: over her breast hovers, what probably was an Angel,

but much defaced : and at her feet is a Warrior erect, and perhaps originally in a praying posture ; but he is likewise mutilated by Time. At her feet is also a rude sculpture of a Bull's or Ox's Head ; which the Editor of the Ballad not unreasonably conjectures to have been the Lady's Crest. This was as he observes, the Crest of the Widdrington Family, whose castle is but five miles from this Hermitage. It was also the ancient Crest of the Nevilles, and of one or two other families in the North.

On the same side is another Door-case, and near it an Excavation to contain the Holy Water. Over both the Door-cases are still seen the traces of Letters, vestiges of two ancient Inscriptions ; but so much defaced as to be at present illegible. I must refer you to the Poem for a further account of them.

This Door opens into a little Vestibule, containing two square Niches, in which the Hermit sat to contemplate; and his view from hence was well calculated to inspire meditation. He looked down upon the River which washes the foot of the Hermitage, and glides away in a constant murmuring lapse; and he might thence have taken occasion, like the Author of the Night Thoughts, to remind some young thoughtless Visitant.

- “ Life glides away, Lorenzo ! like a stream,
 “ For ever changing, unperceiv’d the change.
 “ In the same stream none ever bath’d him
 twice;
 “ To the same life none ever twice awoke.
 “ We call the stream the same, the same we
 think
 “ Our life, tho’ still more rapid in its flow;
 “ Nor mark the Much irrevocably laps’d,
 “ And mingled with the sea.

Over the Inner Door, within the Vestibule, hangs another Scutcheon

with some Sculpture, which we took for the representation of a Gauntlet; perhaps it was the Founder's Arms or crest. On the outward face of the Rock, the small Vestibule above-mentioned, is a winding Stair-case cut also in the living stone, and leading through a neat arched Door-case in the same, up to the top of the Cliff which joins the level of the ancient Park; and here was planted the Hermit's Orchard. This has long since been destroyed; but Cherry-trees propagated from his Plantations are still scattered over the neighbouring thicket. His Garden was below at the foot of the hill, as we were informed; and indeed some straggling flowers and one little solitary Gooseberry bush, which still grows out of a cleft in the rock confirm the tradition.

As all the Apartments, before described seem to have been appropriated

to sacred uses, you will naturally enquire where was the Dwelling of the Hermit, or at least of his Successors? This was a small square building, erected at the foot of the cliff, that contains the Chapel. It consisted of one single Dwelling-room, with a Bed-chamber over it; and a small Kitchen adjoining; which is now fallen in and covered with earth; but the ruins of the Oven still mark its situation, and shew that some of the inhabitants of this Hermitage did not always dislike good cheer.

This little building, erected below the Chapel, being composed of materials brought together by human hands, has long since gone to ruin: whereas the Walls of the Chapel itself, being as old as the World, will, if not purposely destroyed, probably last as long as it and continue to amuse the latest posterity. It gave me particular plea-

sure to observe, that the present noble Proprietors have thought this curiosity not unworthy their attention, and have therefore bestowed a proper care to have it kept clean and neat; have cleared the Hermit's Path, which was choaked up by the River's side; have restored his Well, (a small bubbling Fountain of clear water, which issues from the adjoining Rock;) and have renewed the Wood by new Plantations at the top of the Cliff where the Trees had been thinned or destroyed by time.

In this delightful solitude, so beautiful in itself and so venerable for its antiquity, you will judge with what pleasure I perused the very amusing and interesting Tale of the Hermit of Warkworth: having the whole Scene before me, and fancying I was present at the Hermit's tender relation.

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And this leads me to your last Query; What Foundation the Author of the Poem had for his Story, which he gives as founded on truth? By all the enquiries I could make in the neighbourhood, it is the received tradition, that the Founder of this Hermitage was one of the Bertram family, who were anciently Lords of Bothal Castle, and had great possessions in this county. He is also thought to be the same Bertram who having built Brinkburn Abbey, and Brinkshaugh Chapel higher up the River, at last retired to end his life in this sequestered valley. But the Editor has given reasons, why he thinks the Hermitage was founded at a later period than those Buildings, by another of the same Name and Family. It is also the universal tradition, that he imposed this penance upon himself to expiate the murder of his Brother. As for the Lady, I could not find that

any thing particular is remembered concerning her; but the elegant Sculpture of her Figure on the Tomb, and the Crest at her feet, seem sufficiently to warrant the Story of the Ballad.

The old Record of the Endowment of this Hermitage by the Percy family, which the Editor has printed at the end of his Poem, is a curiosity very singular in its kind. When I perused it I could not help smiling at the Article of the *Trinity Draught of Fish*, to be taken opposite to the Chapel, which was to be the Hermit's Perquisite every Sunday. It was, I assure you, no contemptible Perquisite, for there is a very rich Salmon Fishery in this River belonging to the Duke and Dutchess of Northumberland; and I was told, that at one single draught, this summer, more than Three Hun-

dred fish had been taken opposite to the Hermitage*.

I shall conclude my long, tedious description with a Stanza from Spencer; which, if you will pardon a few alterations, will give you a pretty exact Picture of the place.

" A little lonely Hermitage there stood
 " Down in a dale hard by a River's side,
 " Beneath a mossy Cliff, o'erhung with Wood;
 " And in the living Rock, there close beside,
 " A holy Chapel, entering we descried;
 " Wherein the Hermit duly wont to say
 " His lonely prayers, each morn and even tide:
 " Thereby the crystal stream did gently play,
 " Which thro' the woody Vale came rolling
 down alway."

* I have been assured, that more than Four Hundred Fish, chiefly Salmon, Salmon-trouts and Gills, have been taken at one Draught between the Hermitage and the Sea which is about two miles distant.

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